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STC students choose the 'high road'

By Charley Townsley
Staff Writer

Danielle Dunning and Gloria Fonseca had concerns about the impact of the tougher immigration laws currently being discussed by the U.S. Congress.

They wanted to help the cause that many high school students have recently undertaken, only in a more positive manner.

"I ride the bus to Chelsea with a lot of Hispanic students," said Dunning. "They're my friends! I don't want to see bad things happen to them or their families. We wanted to do something to make our leaders aware of our opinions, something more positive and meaningful than simply a walk-out."

Dunning and Fonseca took their concerns to Dan Lopez, high school counselor. With his help and the support of high school principal Steve Burr, they put together a meeting Monday morning, April 4, with Armando Villsreal and Melissa Esquivel from the Division of Latino Affairs, Des Moines, to learn just how they could make a difference. There were over 50 students, mostly Latino, in attendance.

"Your presence here today means you've already made a difference," said Villsreal. "The youth of this country have always been the ones to help shape its history."

Villsreal and Esquivel welcomed the opportunity to come to the STC High School. They are in the early stages of developing a Youth Civic Participation Project (YCPP) under the umbrella of the Iowa Division of Latino Affairs, a part of the Iowa Department of Human Rights.

Of the 405 high school attendance centers in the state of Iowa, 95 percent of the minority students are enrolled in one of 47 high schools. STC High School is one of the 47 high schools. The goal of YCPP is to elect 100 students from the 47 high schools to form a student congress which would meet regionally and then at a state convention in Des Moines in October. Des Moines will be the host city for the eighth annual Latino conference and it is hoped that the students' state conference would be held at the same time as



Armando Villsreal speaks to STC High School students and staff about Latino student issues in the STC High School media center Monday, April 3. Seated behind Villsreal is Melissa Esquivel, also with the Iowa Division of Latino Affairs . Photo by Charley Townsley

a “showcase event” for the larger conference.

The STC students were encouraged to get involved in their community and in the political process. “Read the newspapers and learn to interpret the information the media is giving you,” Villsreal said. “Then after you meet with one another to discuss the issues that are a concern to you, take that message to your political leaders.”

The goal of the state convention is to define three issues through the regional meeting process most important to the Latino youth, and convey those at the state convention. Students were encouraged to network with community leaders, local police, and their state senators and representatives. “You have the energy and the spark, to go along with the courage,” said Villsreal, “now learn to be smart and make positive changes.”

Villsreal told students that Iowa’s population is expected to increase one percent over the next 25 years, but the Latino population will grow by 187,000. “That means many of you will stay here and have families of your own here.”

Tama Police Chief Dan Wilkens commended the students for choosing to voice their concerns in a more productive manner. He encouraged them to become more involved in the community and to come to him, or any police officer if they need help. “We can’t help you unless we know what the problem is,” he said. Senior students, in particular, expressed concerns over financial aid for college bound students. “There’s a lot of help out there,” said Lopez, “but if a student is undocumented, the opportunities disappear quickly.”

Villsreal told students it was not their fault they are here. “There are an estimated 12 million undocumented immigrants living in the United States,” he said. Of those people, 90-95 percent are working here. “There are many loud immigration issues,” he said. “It’s in your hands now. It’s possible to work together peacefully to solve many of these problems.”

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